



Aalborg Universitet

AALBORG UNIVERSITY  
DENMARK

## Urban space for everyone

*Challenges, conflicts and measures*

Nørgaard, Helle; Børresen, Sølvi Karin

*Publication date:*  
2008

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Nørgaard, H., & Børresen, S. K. (2008). *Urban space for everyone: Challenges, conflicts and measures*. Danish Crime Prevention Council.

### General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal -

### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at [vbn@aub.aau.dk](mailto:vbn@aub.aau.dk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Helle Nørgaard and Sølvi Børresen

# URBAN SPACE FOR EVERYONE

Challenges, conflicts and measures



DET KRIMINAL  
PRÆVENTIVE RÅD



Statens Byggeforskningsinstitut  
AALBORG UNIVERSITET



# URBAN SPACE... FOR EVERYONE

Challenges, conflicts and measures

By Helle Nørgaard and Sølvi Børresen

The Danish Building Research Institute  
Aalborg University



# Foreword



In recent years there has been much focus on the revitalisation of cities and urban space. Streets and squares are expected to offer lively, diverse settings that can accommodate a wide spectrum of users from rollerbladers to café guests and people who simply want to relax in the sun. Urban space should be beautiful and interesting, inviting residents and other users to meet and stay for a while.

But urban space also holds the potential for conflicts and crime: violence, theft, graffiti and sale of drugs take place within the confines of the city. Experience shows, however, that making a conscious effort to properly design, maintain and operate urban space can reduce crime and increase feelings of safety. The desire to prevent crime and increase security can however clash with the desire for diversity and liveliness and it is therefore important to find a good balance between these different elements and considerations. This balance must be rooted in specific local conditions.

For many years there has been a need for knowledge about the crime prevention aspects of urban development which has encouraged The Danish Crime Prevention Council to investigate this area. The purpose is to share knowledge and experience with local politicians, urban planners, operations managers and the police. One particular aspiration is to inspire the district crime prevention councils

in the 12 Danish police districts to discuss a holistic programme of crime prevention in urban space. The study underlying this report is a step in that direction. We hope the report will help create greater awareness of the development of urban space for the benefit of residents and users in the city.

The report focuses on urban life and discusses the questions: Why are some city spaces considered safe and others not? Where do people want to be? What are the inevitable dilemmas in the quest to provide 'urban space for everyone'?

The study is based on eight city spaces in Copenhagen, Odense, Århus and Aalborg with focus on crime prevention measures and experiences from local municipalities and the police. Focus is furthermore on the users' perception of safety in relation to the case study areas which were selected on the basis of their relatively high incidence of crime compared with other parts of the cities: violence, theft and graffiti in particular. The particular urban spaces are places where many people gather and where crime occurs which is the downside of the city's popularity.

The study was conducted by Helle Nørgaard, senior researcher and project manager, and Sølvi Karin Børresen, researcher, from The Danish Building Research Institute. Furthermore, Pernille Arborg, intern, contributed to the study.

Thorkild Ager  
Research Director  
The Danish Building Research Institute

Anna Karina Nickelsen  
Head of secretariat  
The Danish Crime Prevention Council

# Table of contents

<b>Urban space for everyone? – conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>7</b>
City life	10
The city as meeting place	10
Urban revitalisation	10
Multifunctional city space	11
Safety and risks	13
What creates unsafety?	13
Socially marginalised people in public space	14
Making space for marginalised groups	14
Challenges, problems and conflicts	15
 <b>Crime and safety</b>	 <b>16</b>
Routes, moving about and lighting	16
Eyes on squares and places	17
Closed spaces – open spaces	18
Urban spaces – maintenance or neglect	18
Dialogue and interdisciplinary cooperation	19
 <b>‘The good square’</b>	 <b>20</b>
Users’ perceptions of risk	20
Challenges and measures	20
Challenges and measures for the various urban areas	21
The selected cities and city spaces	22
Copenhagen	22
Odense	23
Århus	24
Aalborg	25
Common features of the urban spaces	26

# Urban space for everyone?

## – conclusions and recommendations

Cities are undergoing constant change where local municipalities focus on making urban areas more attractive, lively and interesting and where many new housing developments are taken place. This is largely a success which means more people visit, use and live in cities.

A common goal in the revitalisation process is for urban space to be welcoming and accessible to everyone. At the same time, urban planners try to create flexible, diverse and multicultural space to meet changes in use, preferences and needs. Urban users have different needs and interests which

is a challenge to the concept of 'urban space for everyone'.

Another goal in urban development is to avoid mono-functional areas and instead aim for a mix of activities in certain districts. This means placing stores, cafés, restaurants, amusement arcades, movie theatres and other types of businesses and housing side by side. This is attractive to many people because it livens up the street. But it also creates conflicts when families living in the city have to co-exist with others who use the city as an entertainment centre until the early hours of the morning. By using a more traditional strategy of

avoiding entertainment and other activities in housing areas and concentrating 'urban functions' in other areas such conflicts can be avoided. However, this kind of concentration can leave some parts of the city deserted.

Conceptually, multifunctional urban spaces are designed to meet the need of all users. However, urban planners often have specific users in mind, and some work consciously to design urban space that appeals to selected groups. For although the general goal is to provide flexible, diverse and multicultural space, creating 'common space' is difficult in a time where



Urban success increases the use of the city's various places and spaces. This results in greater wear and tear, which requires ongoing maintenance, repair and renovation. Shown here, Søndergade, the main pedestrian street in Århus.





Popular urban areas are not popular with everyone. Residents' desire for peace and quiet conflicts with the nightlife fuelled by the entertainment options in the neighbourhood. Shown here: Jomfru Ane Gade in Aalborg.

individuality is valued and marked by different and changing needs.

There are many 'urban successes' around the country and in many ways it has been possible to create diverse urban life. However, the urban success is not for everyone since there is not always room and tolerance for all users. Meeting the needs and preferences of the city's various users requires greater focus on specific groups and providing space for selected users - also those who are socially marginalised.

The study shows that users typically say that they do not feel unsafe in the city when asked directly. However, the study also shows that beneath the immediate impression of safety and security, in their daily lives people do think about whether places are safe or unsafe. They avoid walking

in certain areas, instead choosing what is considered 'safe routes'.

Physical surroundings such as buildings and street furniture, lighting and visibility thus influence the feeling of safety. Areas devoid of people are perceived as being unsafe. This shows that safety and security issues are important to consider when working with public space.

Some people perceive urban life and being in the city as unsafe and even dangerous, and avoid certain areas because of fear of what might happen. This is a paradox because the risk of actually being a victim of crime is on the decrease. While the fear of being the victim of crime has risen, for several years now, the crime rate has actually fallen in Denmark and other European countries.

The study shows that the feeling of being unsafe is closely related

to the perception of what and who is dangerous, and rarely to actual experience. This does not hold true for socially marginalised groups, however, whose members are at risk of violence and attack, and who therefore quite naturally feel highly vulnerable.

The conclusion is that working with public space presents many dilemmas. It is crucial to decide what kind of public space is aimed at and to consider who the users might be because particular designs etc. may be diminishing the quality that is valued by some users. There are no clear-cut solutions when working with urban development and creating safe environments for everyone. It is important to consider what kind of urban space is desired, what is feasible, where different functions should be located and who will use particular urban spaces.

It is recommended to:

- Acknowledge urban success, but recognise that increased and different use causes more wear and tear.
- Take a close look at the operation and maintenance of public space. Does it match the increased use of the city and urban success?
- Consider the need for more supervision of public space: reinstate park attendants to embody common norms of behaviour.
- Distinguish between 'urban space for everyone' and 'urban space for some', acknowledging the impossibility of providing safe urban space for everyone at the same time.
- Work with the several and different types of users and carefully weigh their various interests and needs in the urban policy process.
- Improve visibility and lighting quality.
- Strengthen cooperation between the police, urban planners, local businesses, homeowner associations and volunteer organisations along the lines of the well-established



Vandalism and graffiti make many people feel unsafe. Neglect reinforces the feeling that the area is unsupervised.

SSP (formalised local cooperation between the schools, social services and police) cooperation.

The purpose of this report is to provide inspiration for planners, politicians, the police and others involved in urban development. The report contains a description of urban life and deals with the challenges, problems and conflicts related to urban revitalisation and the wide range of users. The description of urban life will hold true for many cities, not only the spaces in

Copenhagen, Odense, Århus and Aalborg that were the basis for the study. The report summarises experiences from planning, designing and operating and use of urban space in the four cities listed above. These experiences form the basis for five recommendations to help create a feeling of safety and prevent crime. The report concludes with descriptions of the selected city spaces plus suggested measures for various types of space. The goal is to inspire others in their efforts to create safer, livelier cities.

Some of the places that feel most safe and pleasant during the day are those that feed insecurity after nightfall. Thinning out trees and bushes to create openness and visibility in the interests of providing safety for some people may spoil what was an urban oasis for others. Shown here: Enghave park in Copenhagen.





# City life



Use of urban space intensifies as cities increasingly seek to promote themselves through activities, events and happenings. Here a juggler entertains a crowd on Strøget, the main pedestrian street in Copenhagen.

Many people find the city's density, crowds, constant change and renewal an attraction and a positive experience in itself. The city offers a wide range of activities and choices such as movie theatres, museum exhibits, visits to cafés and restaurants as well as opportunities to meet other people. Organised musical and cultural events are available alongside spontaneous activities and socialising. Parks and squares provide opportunities for sports or sitting quietly on a bench. Many new housing units have been built, and the city is home to increasing numbers of people. Many go to the city to take advantage of everything it has to offer and to be part of urban life. Familiarity with the city creates a feeling of safety, but the city is also where the unexpected happens. The place to meet

the unknown, to meet strangers. Urban space is under constant change, and in recent years it has drawn in increasing numbers of visitors. The city has become a success.

Retail opening hours have been liberalised, and many cities have seen an increase in the numbers of cafés and restaurants many of which provide outdoor service. City squares offer a variety of performances, music, concerts, street theatre and are the sites of festivals and other forms of leisure activities.

## The city as meeting place

The city is a meeting place for many different people with widely divergent backgrounds, whether they live in the city, work there or

come as consumers to buy goods or events. Some are from privately owned houses in the suburbs or from housing estates, others come from regions further afield or abroad and all have different relations and experiences with the city.

Those living in the city move from one part of the city to another depending on their activities and doings and whom they are meeting with.

**'Children and young people gather from all over the city and from communities 30 km away from Aalborg. We see youth come all the way from Skagen [ed. 100 km] to meet and hang out with others.'**  
(Aalborg police)

But young people are far from alone, sharing the city with lots of other users who have their own interests, needs, expectations and norms. In many ways they are competing for public space, with different groups occupying parts of city and frequently changing places such as a street corner, a square, a park. For part of the day a pedestrian street is filled with shoppers, while at other times the street is taken over by young skaters.

The city and its urban spaces are characterised by having various uses and users depending on time of day. Thus divergent groups with different norms can use the same space without any problem. But conflicts or feelings of unsafety can also arise when different users want to use the same city space at the same time, but for very different purposes.

## Urban revitalisation

Extensive urban renewal has made living in the city attractive, and new



Young people in particular occupy city space. Some come occasionally, while others come often, perhaps daily. The young are mobile and use the city's various spaces for different purposes. Shown here: Nytorv square in Aalborg.

housing and courtyard renovation have brought the housing standard up to the level of newer suburban areas.

For decades Danish city centres were inhabited by a relatively uniform group of residents: the young and the old. Urban renewal projects have converted small flats into larger ones for families, which was possible because former residents who had been rehoused did not want to return to their old flats. The sale of municipal housing stock and the conversion into cooperative housing has also changed the mix of residents.

**'Urban renewal has allowed other clientele to move in. The newcomers are well organised and articulate with very high expectations and demands.'** (Copenhagen planner)

In some cases young residents stay in the city even when they start having children which change their needs and interests along the way. In other cases new residents move to the city from the suburbs, bringing with them the norms upheld there plus the expectation of peace and quiet. Buyers purchasing high-priced city flats may have correspondingly high expectations and demands. In any case,

the residents' different lifestyles, norms, expectations and desires sometimes give rise to conflicts.

**'People are less accommodating. There is less tolerance today. Even though conditions in Vesterbro have improved, people complain more.'** (Copenhagen police)

Vesterbro in inner-city Copenhagen has been subject to major renewal efforts and general revitalisation which have attracted new residents. The drug addicts who have long claimed the area near Maria Church for their own make residents feel unsafe. In response to this public space has been fenced off. What was once public space has thus been converted into private space that excludes other users.

### Multifunctional city space

The political goal is to create lively cities. In many planning documents the visual, functional, recreational, cultural and social aspects of the design of streets and squares and other public space is being emphasised. Focus is on improving city space with opportunities for changing and spontaneous activities. Municipalities also organise activities, events and entertainment to make the city attractive. All these initiatives draw in many users and accelerate wear and tear on the city.

The use of the city is not restricted to the people who live there but



Although we use the city differently depending on our norms and values, we often have the same objective. Shown left, a pub in the Østerbro quarter of Copenhagen. Shown right, Vadestedet, a café and restaurant area in Århus.





Many new dwellings are being built in parts of the city, attracting new residents and changing the use of the city. This represents a new situation as well as new norms.

is open to everyone. Cities have increasingly become a meeting place attracting young people from within the city, from the suburbs nearby as well as distant regions. The young often meet just to hang out together, but there are also cases where they arrange to meet to and have a fight. That makes other users feel unsafe, but the problem is difficult to solve. If young people get word the police are on their way, they just move to a different area. Mobile phones enable them to quickly disappear from one place and reappear in another. That makes it extremely difficult for the police to find groups of young people who are disturbing the peace or who are committing crime.

**'The way children and young people communicate with each other, meet and part is based on a social understanding and way of using the city that is new to us.' (Copenhagen planner)**

This also means that problems can shift from one geographic area to another. For example, police actions to stop sale of cannabis in Freetown Christiania (a partially self-governing Copenhagen neighbourhood with semi-legal status)

have moved both sellers and buyers to Vesterbro and other parts of the city. Similarly, police actions to close down cannabis clubs, which often generate feelings of unsafety, have shifted the problems to other districts.



Enghave park in Copenhagen is very much a multifunctional urban space. By day: sports, groups of pre-schoolers, old people, a supervised playground. By night: groups of immigrants, people arranging dogfights and cannabis dealers.

**'People who live in the area call and say they don't dare go out at night because of the aggressive dogs and groups of youth, as well as the people hanging around street corners in connection with cannabis dealing.'** (District manager, roads and parks service, Copenhagen)

One of the challenges of developing good city space is that as a starting point it should accommodate all users and meet all corresponding needs. Another challenge is that city space should be flexible and future-oriented in terms of use and users.

### Safety and risks

Sense of safety and security is highly individual. Some people feel insecure about situations that barely affect others. The feeling can change over time and is influenced by recent events. Some people are congenital worriers while others are more robust. Personality, background and personal experience strongly influence what frightens us and makes us feel at risk.

**'People feel reassured and relieved when the police turn up, but too much police presence isn't good because then people think there are problems.'** (Odense police officer)

Different people react differently to situations that make them feel unsafe. Some take an offensive and constructive approach to the uncertain and risky aspects of life. Others try to reduce their sense of unsafety and insecurity by avoiding situations and places that make them feel vulnerable.

### What creates unsafety?

Overall, the users who were interviewed in the study felt safe moving about the city. They cited 'personal familiarity with the area' as one of the most important elements of feeling safe and secure. Users expressed that the time of day has a major impact on how safe they feel, and that darkness alone gives a feeling of being



This dark tunnel connects a park with the railway station in Aalborg. Pedestrian traffic is heavy during the day, but at night the area is deserted and some people hesitate to use the tunnel.

unsafe. Some older women said that they basically never go out at night, and in general the women who were interviewed felt more unsafe after dark than did the men.

Dense closed space with few exits is considered unsafe and are places many users avoid. Poor or no lighting reinforces the feeling of unsafety when it is dark,

and the police add that in some cases there is good reason to be on guard. Physical surroundings clearly influence the sense of safety, and poor maintenance such as litter, damaged benches, broken windows, graffiti and other types of vandalism signal unsafe environments. Deserted areas and narrow empty streets also make many users uneasy.



Tall trees, dense bushes and low visibility fuel the fear that someone may be lurking nearby. Shown here: Enghave park in Copenhagen.



## **Socially marginalised people in public space**

The people who were interviewed say that drug addicts and alcoholics make them feel unsafe, as do the mentally ill who occupy or even live in the city's parks and squares. Both police and district managers report that there are more mentally ill people in public space than there used to be. One reason is that mental hospitals have fewer beds available for this group. Instead, a district psychiatry scheme has been established under which patients live in ordinary housing areas and are expected to seek help or receive treatment in their own homes. This leaves a group of people who are unable to seek contact with the healthcare system and who are very much on their own.

**'A lot of the problems that end up in public space are actually social problems. The roads and parks service is not really equipped to handle them.'** (District manager, roads and parks service)

Many of the users find that marginalised groups have a strong presence in public space and and feel excluded by the norms and rules set out by this group of

people. Many users avoid places favoured by marginalised groups. Planners and district park managers who participated in the study say that many people turn to them because they don't feel comfortable walking past a group of people sitting drinking in public.

**'I think it creates a general feeling of unease if you see behaviour that is unexpected and unmotivated. Something outside your own set of rules. What makes drug addicts and drunks unpleasant is that they do things we really don't care to witness.'** (Copenhagen planner)

Large groups of people in general make other people feel unsafe when they themselves are the minority. This is also the case with large groups of young people who make a lot of noise.

**'It's mainly a group of neglected youth ages 12-18 who create a lot of insecurity.'** (Aalborg police officer)

The study shows that the user groups that feel the most vulnerable and insecure are marginalised people themselves, who in many cases have been attacked or subjected to various types of harassment. Several of these us-

ers also said that knowing they are unwanted in public space makes them feel unsafe.

## **Making space for marginalised groups**

The four cities in the study take different approaches to the marginalised groups that occupy public space. Most have removed large numbers of benches in recent years to discourage unwanted groups from taking over city space. However, this diminishes the quality of the same space, because it prevents others from sitting down comfortably to enjoy the view or a sunny day.

**'The harsh reality is that we have removed up to two-thirds of the benches in public space over the past 20 years.'** (Copenhagen planner)

Some cities have made conscious efforts to separate users and creating playgrounds, football fields, basketball courts, etc. which are separated from benches and sitting areas. Focus is all together on creating open spaces with good visibility as experience shows that if trees and bushes are allowed to make the space too dense, marginalised groups take over such spaces, deterring other groups from using them.

Some cities have experimented with setting up shelters for marginalised groups outside the city centre, and consider that a good solution. Others see marginalised groups as part of city life and have attempted to design space with them in mind. Thus local authorities have different views on where it is most appropriate to designate space or shelters for marginalised groups. One view is that it is better to keep them in the heart of the city, because an urban core is better equipped to handle many different kinds of people. Alternatively, some decision-makers focus on moving 'problem' groups out of the city centre.



Marginalised groups, including the homeless, feel unsafe about occupying city squares, which are 'home' to them. Local authorities take different approaches to handling this group of users, but no one claims to have found an ideal solution.

**Challenges, problems and conflicts**

The study shows that working with, and planning for urban space presents numerous challenges. Politicians, business and trade associations, restaurant and café

owners and many users find it attractive that the city is in high gear and is used by many people. In contrast, some residents and other users want the city quiet and peaceful. Another challenge is that

while some users seek diversity, surprise, festivity and welcomes what is foreign and unknown, others have a need to control and limit accessibility to make the city safe, familiar and predictable.

Challenges and conflicts	
Life in the city	Quiet in the city
Diversity and contrast	Safety, predictability and familiarity

The study indicates a change in norms with regard to the use of public urban space: rather than considering others, today users are more likely to focus on their own needs and desires. The study shows that the development of social relations and networks is not necessarily rooted in the place we live, but rather that individual choices are made about whom and where to meet.

Development in problems and challenges	
- from	- to
Consideration for other users	Focus on own needs and desires
Place based values and norms	Selected meetings with like-minded
Own responsibility	Public responsibility
Public space	Private gated space

The study also shows that people are more likely to turn to public authorities to solve conflicts than to try and sort out problems with neighbours or other users. Safety issues have brought about some distinct changes in public space, such as door intercoms and locked courtyards. There are also examples where public space near residential areas is fenced in order to protect residents from potential risk. This converts public space into private territory that bars other users from access.

Overall, changes in use and shifts in norms regarding city space present many challenges for the planning, revitalisation and use of urban space. It is also a challenge for the police and for operating and maintaining city space, particularly in terms of preventing crime and creating a sense of safety.

In many places, doors and gates are locked to prevent ‘undesirable elements’ from occupying courtyards. Shown: a renovated courtyard in the middle of Fredericia.





# Crime and safety

This report aims to identify crime prevention measures and initiatives for making urban spaces safer for users. It is based on interviews conducted with urban planners, district park managers, police and users of urban spaces in Copenhagen, Odense, Århus and Aalborg in an attempt to gain insight into the types of problem in the various districts and to explain why they arise. More specifically the purpose is to illustrate experiences, ways of cooperating between the parties involved and lessons learned in relation to crime preventive measures.

The experiences of urban planners can be categorised into three themes:

- The design of urban spaces and the challenges relative to different user groups
- Crime prevention planning, crime prevention strategies and

cooperation with other parties

- Use and users in the city, the ways different groups occupy urban spaces, and the interviewees' impression of how different users perceive the city from a safety viewpoint.

The interviews with police focused on user groups, overall crime rates, types of crime, police initiatives and different crime prevention measures. Police were also asked about their cooperative partners when dealing with young people as well as marginalised groups such as the homeless.

In the study observations were made in the early morning, afternoon and evening, and passers-by were interviewed in relation to use of the eight urban spaces. One theme was users' general use and routes around the city, whether they avoided particular places, and if so, why. Another theme was us-

ers' perception of the place, crime in the area, and the source of information about the selected places. A third theme was users' feeling of safety and security at various times of day. A fourth theme was users' description of 'good' and 'bad' public places and squares.

Together, the interviews and observations provided input for crime prevention and safety-enhancing measures. The study shows that municipalities are aware of crime prevention recommendations to open up urban spaces, make them visible and populate them. However, the study also showed that none of the municipalities pursued a general crime prevention strategy that systematically implements these recommendations. As a result, it was not possible to evaluate the effect of initiatives in the eight city spaces. The following suggestions for improving safety and preventing crime are the sum of different experiences in the four cities rather than based on specific measures for selected urban spaces.

## Routes, moving about and lighting

The freedom to choose safe routes and have alternatives when moving about the city is crucial to the perception of safety. Good lighting is especially important in this regard. When discussing safe routes, a distinction should be made between necessary and optional movements. Focus on lighting is particularly important in areas that people have to use, for example, areas connecting central functions in the city such as the railway station and shopping zones. Other routes are chosen freely as shortcuts – a narrow alley, a deserted square or a dark park – places they do not need to



Many cities ban alcohol consumption, which means people cannot sit on a bench and drink where in contrast users are allowed to drink in cafés and restaurants. The police rarely enforce this prohibition. The sign shown prohibiting the use of alcohol is in the centre of Nykøbing Falster.



When working with lighting solutions, planners can alter users' routes by turning an optional shortcut into a main route. The photograph shows the Kongens Have park in Odense.

go but choose of their own accord. The same lighting requirements do not apply to these areas, and in relation to parks there is rather the need to consider the need for seclusion when visiting parks.

Several municipalities are making conscious attempts to improve lighting, and their work has shown positive results. In some cases, authorities initiated their own lighting projects such as in Odense, where the safety and security aspects of lighting were examined. A walk through the city can be the first stage towards creating an urban lighting plan. During the walk,

planners should consider the desired use of and movement within the urban space and how lighting can be used to prevent crime and create sense of safety.

### Eyes on squares and places

Urban spaces, pedestrian streets and city centres that are abandoned and deserted cause many people to feel unsafe. The goal for many municipalities and planning departments is to integrate different functions in order to create a lively environment. Attempts are also being made to preserve housing in city centres so that these quarters stay populated after work-

The study shows that people compensate for lack of lighting by choosing alternative routes. The study also shows that good lighting creates a sense of safety and that planners should consider the safety aspects of lighting as well as the desired use of and movement within urban spaces. A walk throughout the city focusing on lighting and safety can be a tool to this end.

ing hours and at weekends.

The police have focus on being present when they know many people are going to congregate, such as at big events like football matches and concerts, or when many people are out on the town. However, the rise in reported crime is evidence that this problem also occurs elsewhere. There is a great deal of focus on the extent to which video surveillance prevents crime. The study showed that surveillance can help the police to solve crime, but also that crimes such as violence, assault and vandalism often happen after people have been drinking or using other substances and, in such cases, surveillance probably has a limited effect on preventing crime. Although video surveillance makes some people feel safe, it can also create a false sense of security.



Focus on lighting is needed in places that people need to pass through to get from one part of the city to another.

The study reveals a dilemma: to separate or to combine dwellings with other city functions such as restaurants and cafés. While the goal of urban development and planning has gradually become to mix functions in individual urban quarters and areas, the study shows that this blend also has a downside such as conflicts between various users and also an increase in crime and violence in particular that occurs when many people gather. Although populating urban spaces is good for people's sense of safety, it also generates problems when a wide variety of activities go on simultaneously.





The presence of private residences around public squares means many people may be watching, a form of 'surveillance' that has a crime prevention effect. But if the square has lots of users, conflicts and crime may also result. Louise Square in Aalborg is deserted.

### **Closed spaces – open spaces**

Closed, non-transparent public spaces may cause a sense of unease but they also have qualities. A closed park can feel unsafe, especially in the evening, because it affords few escape routes. Fencing also means that certain groups can take over and dominate the space, preventing others from using it. However, other considerations speak in favour of closed, fenced-in urban spaces.

Open spaces are a contrast to closed spaces. Open, unfenced areas can be a problem because they have no clearly defined boundaries. Consequently, such areas can act as transit spaces and lose the qualities of closed parks. The study shows that some of the safest and most pleasant places during the day are those people find most unsettling after nightfall. There is a need for a variety of urban spaces – even those that seem unsafe after nightfall. The solution here is to offer alternative

The study shows there are no precise guidelines for working with open and closed spaces. Open, unfenced spaces offer unimpeded views and an openness that promotes safety. Closed spaces have other, recreational qualities that are lost if fences and plants are removed to create overview and openness. There is a need both types of urban space.

routes for getting from one place to another.



One of the qualities of recreational areas is that they can be screened off from the surrounding city, offering a much needed oasis. Fencing can help block out noise and provide shelter and privacy, as well as making the place safe for groups like parents with young children. Shown here: Enghave park in Copenhagen.

### **Urban spaces – maintenance or neglect**

Maintaining and refurbishing public urban spaces is crucial to our sense of safety. The study shows that lack of maintenance sets a vicious circle in motion and that places that are not taken care of often attract marginalised groups such as substance abusers.



# 'The good square'

Many factors determine whether a square is experienced as pleasant and attractive. First and foremost, it not only has to do with the square itself. The surrounding areas, buildings and functions are essential to how people experi-

velopment goals for urban spaces. Planners strive to develop multifunctional, multicultural and flexible city spaces that meet the needs of different users and offer opportunities for a variety of activities. This means that use and users change,



The good square in Piran, Slovenia.

ence the square. Last but not least, the square's other users have an impact on how the square is perceived. The study shows that users have a clear idea of what constitutes 'good' and 'bad' places and city spaces. Overall, there is broad agreement that a good, safe place is one where there are many people and a pleasant atmosphere. Good urban spaces are 'places with people and light', whereas deserted squares and streets are often considered unsafe. A common thread is that personal familiarity with a location makes people feel safe and secure.

For many users, the familiar and predictable are inextricably linked with the feeling of safety. This contradicts general planning and de-

velopment goals for urban spaces. Planners strive to develop multifunctional, multicultural and flexible city spaces that meet the needs of different users and offer opportunities for a variety of activities. This means that use and users change,

## **Users' perceptions of risk**

The study shows that users' perception of crime is based on information from television, newspapers and hearsay. About half think crime rates have dropped or remained stable and that violence is the most common form of crime. The people surveyed had not personally been the victims of crime or experienced any violence, with the exception of some of the socially marginalised people.

The study shows that users have preconceptions about ethnic minorities and housing complexes with a bad reputation. The topic of 'strangers' was important to the

interviewees who brought this up themselves. Many said they felt unsafe near groups of young people, especially ethnic minorities. Interviewees also referred to certain housing areas as 'unsafe', although their only knowledge of these areas came from the media and hearsay. No-one had ever personally visited the housing areas in question. Interviews with users show that assumptions about dangerous people and places have a significant impact on their feeling of safety.

The study shows that the feeling of safety is related to notions of danger. Feelings of being unsafe when visiting certain urban spaces is rarely founded in actual experience; rather, they have a media-created image and perception of places and people that pose danger – perceptions that are present when moving about in the city.

## **Challenges and measures**

Spaces in cities have different functions and forms; for example, parks, city centres and pedestrian streets differ in their use and layout. Many spaces have overlapping functions such as a café on a pedestrian street or in the city centre that acts as a meeting place as well as a place to spend time. A park or a square can be a place to meet, but can also simply be a place people pass through on their way from one destination to another – a transit space. Some urban spaces function both as transit spaces and places to stay. Focus in the study was on three different types of urban space that combined account for the bulk of space in a city: transit spaces, parks, and city centres/pedestrian streets.



## Challenges and measures for the various urban areas

	Challenges	Measures
<b>Transit spaces</b>	<p>Often anonymous and act primarily as pedestrian thoroughfares.</p> <p>Open without clearly defined boundaries.</p> <p>Do not invite people to stay; attract marginalised groups that have nowhere else to go.</p>	<p>Create activity zones in the space but ensure it remains open with an unobstructed view.</p> <p>Plan activities and events that give the space a new role and identity.</p>
<b>Parks</b>	<p>Attract many users in day-time hours. Although parks offer a haven in the city, after nightfall they assume a different guise, and their dense, enclosed design and lack of overview and escape routes can create unsafety.</p>	<p>Illuminate main paths while maintaining the densely planted areas so people feel safe.</p> <p>Build activity zones that attract and keep different types of users at different times of day.</p>
<b>City centres/ pedestrian streets</b>	<p>Most towns throughout the country have many users during the day, but many town centres and pedestrian streets are deserted once the shops close. Abandoned, deserted, poorly lit streets create insecurity. Paradoxically, 'night on the town' activities can cause conflicts and insecurity.</p>	<p>Encourage inner-city housing and mix residential with commercial and business areas.</p> <p>Create activities and functions that attract users after closing hours.</p> <p>Investigate the most appropriate areas to place 'night on the town' functions.</p>

## The selected cities and city spaces

The cities in the study were founded hundreds of years ago, and only limited changes have been made to their historic centres. The squares and parks, streets and neighbourhoods that connected the town can still be identified on city maps. A bird's eye view of the city often clearly shows which routes people use to get from one place to another, for example, from the city's rail and bus terminals to the city centre. Seen from above, the places that attract many people are also obvious, as are the places, squares and streets that are relatively deserted.

### Copenhagen

In Copenhagen the focus was on Amagertorv, a square, and Engshave park. Amagertorv, with its famous stork fountain, is located in the city centre while the park is in the city's Vesterbro district.

#### *Amagertorv*

Amagertorv in Copenhagen is a meeting place. It is a vibrant square with performing artists and numerous other activities that contribute to city life. Amagertorv boasts cafés, which appeal to the young and make it a hip meeting place. It also has a wealth of shops and is heavily frequented by tourists. Lots of people gather here, attracting others who commit crimes such as theft, robbery and street robbery. Violence occurs later in the evening, especially when people make their way home from the pubs to the town hall square to catch a night bus or to the central railway station to catch a train. This is a problem throughout Strøget, the city's main pedestrian street. It is typically drunks that are involved in violent incidents that mostly take place between people who already know each other or between those who have met in the course of the evening. An opinion expressed by all the people interviewed on Amagertorv was that they felt safe on the square irrespective of time of day. The square



Many people use Strøget, Copenhagen's pedestrian street, and Amagertorv square. The countless shopping streets attract lots of people – including those who commit crimes such as theft and robbery.

is perceived as a pleasant place to stay or pass through because it has good visibility.

#### *Engshave park*

Engshave park in the Vesterbro district of Copenhagen has many different users. Some are local people who work in the vicinity and use the park to sit on a bench and enjoy the sun or people who walk the dog, while others are parents with children who play in the park. The park has a supervised playground whose staff activate and play with the children. People enjoy sport on the basketball court. Engshave park can be described as a place that leads a double life, if not more. It has a daytime existence when children, parents and

older people visit. In the evening, the users are groups of young people who have arranged to meet in the park. The park is often subject to vandalism and used by dog owners who organise dog fights there. There is a brisk trade in cannabis as well. Patrons of the nearby night club Vega often cause trouble here. The life that unfolds in the park in the evening makes many local residents feel extremely unsafe. Immediately adjoining Engshave park is a square, primarily used by beer drinkers who come every day. A circular hedge partially screens the square, hiding it fairly well from passers-by. The square is described as a safe place during the day but less so in the evening.



Although Engshave park is a green oasis in the city, it is a place some nonetheless avoid.

## Odense

In Odense, the urban spaces selected were Kongens Have, St Hans Square and the railway station square. These three adjoining areas are considered an integrated whole.

### *Kongens Have*

Kongens Have in Odense is a historic park, which, together with Odense Castle, is part of Denmark's cultural heritage. Kongens Have is centrally located and connects the railway station with the city centre. The area thus functions more as a transit zone than a proper recreational park. A possible explanation is that the city has other more attractive recreational areas, such as Munke Mose. A very mixed group uses the park. Some people pass through on their way to and from the city centre; groups of children and young people – many from the nearby school – play ball here; other people simply sit on a bench enjoying the sun. Marginalised groups are also present, including some visibly under the influence of drink or drugs.

Kongens Have is relatively open, but the inner area has rows of benches surrounded by tall hedges. A considerable amount of drug dealing goes on here. In the past, the park was the scene of numerous robberies, but a special action group was brought in as well as the city police patrol unit, which led to a drop in crime. Some male and female interviewees feel unsafe using the park after nightfall.

### *St Hans Square and the railway station square*

St Hans Church and Marie Jørgensen's School are located on St Hans Square. Between the church and the school is a car park used by the schoolchildren's parents, churchgoers and others. Parents have complained that the presence



Drug dealing is one of the activities that go on behind the tall hedges of Kongens Have, Odense.

of groups of marginalised people on the square makes them feel unsafe and uncomfortable. Local authority planners describe the square as slightly dark and dull, and would like to open it up to attract more people to pass through. The railway station square was built in 2005. It is an open, slightly elevated paved square with flights of steps and benches, minimal plants and a statue of Hans Chris-

tian Andersen on his travels, a sculptural interpretation by an artist; Børn Nørgaard. The square has an underground car park. The area acts primarily as a transit space and a short stay zone, for example, when people stop to read the wall newspaper on the façade of Fyens Stiftstidende's new media house. The interviewees generally feel safe using St Hans Square and the railway station square.



The railway station square is used mainly as a transit space.



## Århus

Together, St Clemens Square, St Clemens Bridge and Vadestedet can be considered a single area on two levels. St Clemens Bridge is a continuation of the pedestrian street, Søndergade, and crosses Århus Å, the river running through the city. Vadestedet lies alongside the river below.

### *St Clemens Square and St Clemens Bridge*

The height of St Clemens Bridge gives pedestrians an unimpeded view in all directions. From one side, they can look down on Vadestedet with its wealth of cafés and restaurants, while the other side offers a view of Åboulevarden, the riverside boulevard. Users describe the square and bridge as an area that they 'like to visit'.

### *Vadestedet*

When Århus Å was uncovered at the end of the 1990s, a special city area – Vadestedet – was created on the section from Immervad to St Clemens Square. Vadestedet houses a wide array of restaurants and cafés, with the focus on providing opportunities for outdoor activities in summer. The area attracts tourists and locals alike. The clientele changes several times over a 24-hour period: during the day business people eat lunch here, in the evening young families out for dinner are the main users, followed by university students enjoying a café latte or a beer. Around 10 pm the students go home, and the slightly more 'hard core' user group takes over. It is only after 10 pm and into the night that problems arise. From end-May to end-June and again from mid-August to end-September, police are on special alert in the area



St Clemens Bridge affords a good view of city life by the river, but many people are deterred from using the area under the bridge because they cannot see what is going on.

because crowds of people gather here for various events such as the Århus Festival week in August-September. Young people are typically those who cause trouble and commit crime, and the police have special focus on the group termed 'young people who cause

insecurity'. The crime rate is fairly low relative to the large number of people in the area. Users describe the area around Vadestedet, St Clemens Square and St Clemens Bridge as a safe area and with 'good places' for passing the time of day.



Cafés and restaurants one after another at Vadestedet.

## Aalborg

In Aalborg, John F. Kennedy's Square and Bispensgade, starting at Nytorv, were the areas selected for the study. John F. Kennedy's Square is situated near two heavily trafficked streets, Jyllandsgade and Prinsensgade. Nytorv lies towards the Aalborg city centre, and the pedestrian street Bispensgade originates in Nytorv.

### *John F. Kennedy's Square*

John F. Kennedy's Square shows the characteristics typical of an area somewhere between a transit space and a park. The square provides access to a long underground tunnel leading to Kildeparken. Fronting Jyllandsgade and Prinsensgade are bus stops with bus shelters. Dense traffic makes the area very noisy and thus unattractive for spending any amount of time. However, a 'square within a square' has been built – a circular place to stay with benches set off by a row of trees. A group of beer-drinkers have adopted this circular space as their daytime hang-out. This group have expressed great satisfaction with the square, describing it as a pleasant and safe place for meeting friends. Planners and police, who know the area well, say these regular users do not pose a problem. However, a few of the passers-by who were interviewed said they felt uncomfortable and unsafe when passing the benches occupied by beer drinkers.

### *Bispensgade from Nytorv*

Bispensgade is a busy shopping street with speciality shops and cafés that bustle with life. It is a place where people stroll, shop, watch life pass by and observe the city. Jomfru Ane Gade, a side street to Bispensgade, boasts many restaurants and disco-theques, popular places frequently



Kennedy Square is primarily a place used by the city's marginalised groups.

visited by young people. Jomfru Ane Gade and the Bispensgade shopping street are connected and, according to the police, unsafe at night.

Nytorv seems to have special significance for young people, a showcase where they go to be 'seen' and meet others. The young people on Nytorv are very

loud and moves around which is often a reason that other users feel unsafe. However, the users interviewed did not find Bispensgade an unsafe place to be. It has good street lighting, and the shops are also lit up after normal opening hours. Nonetheless, there are a few narrow alleyways and niches where people can hide, and this can generate a sense of unsafety.



Bispensgade and Nytorv are streets where people meet before going out for a night on the town. Nytorv is a regional traffic hub and the terminus for many regional bus routes.

### **Common features of the urban spaces**

As mentioned in the foreword, the criteria for selecting the eight urban spaces was the high crime rate. Information on the type and extent of crime are registered in the electronic police filing system (POL-SAS). The Danish National Police Centre for Investigation Support (NEC-DATA) integrates a map of the area (Orthofoto) with reported crime data. The geographic coordinates of the crime scene can be used to determine the extent and type of crime in specific parts of the city.

Maps of the selected city spaces show they have higher crime rates than neighbouring quarters. The types of crime are usually vandalism, violence, theft and robbery. These areas are also places where many people meet and gather, which is one reason for the higher crime rates. Physical features such as the layout and maintenance of streets, squares and parks also play a role for the extent of crime while also being vital to users' perception of safety in the city.

**Published by:**

The Danish Crime Prevention Council and the Danish Building Research Institute (SBI), Aalborg University

**Authors:**

Helle Nørgaard, senior researcher and Sølvi Børresen, researcher both SBI

**Photos:**

Chiliarkiv: front and back covers  
Thorkild Ærø: pages 9 top, 11 bottom, 12 top, 15, 16, 19 and 20  
Pernille Arborg: pages 7, 8, 9 bottom, 10, 11 top, 12 bottom, 13, 17, 18, 19 bottom, 22-25.  
[www.flicker.com/photos/88187767@N00/347689246/](http://www.flicker.com/photos/88187767@N00/347689246/)  
page 14

**Layout:**

Ulla Skov, The Danish Crime Prevention Council

**Printing:**

Prinfo Køge

**Print run:**

1000

ISBN: 978-87-88789-82-9

DKR no.: 08-401-0229

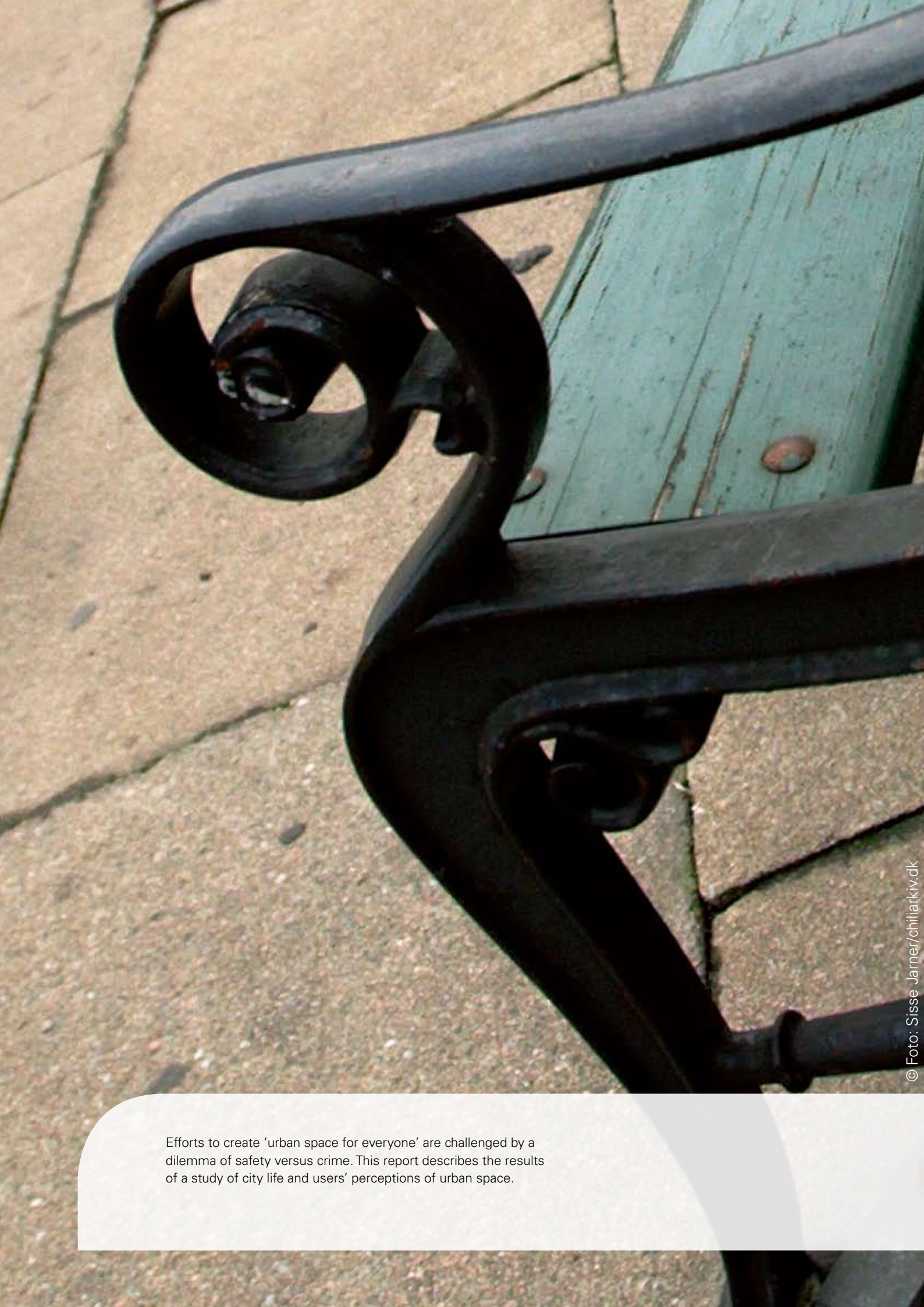
This publication can be ordered from:

The Danish Crime Prevention Council  
Odinsvej 19, 2nd floor  
DK-2600 Glostrup  
Tel.: +45 43 44 88 88  
E-mail: [dkr@dkr.dk](mailto:dkr@dkr.dk)

or downloaded from [www.dkr.dk](http://www.dkr.dk) / [www.sbi.dk](http://www.sbi.dk)

Copying permitted with statement of source.





Efforts to create 'urban space for everyone' are challenged by a dilemma of safety versus crime. This report describes the results of a study of city life and users' perceptions of urban space.